

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“NEED2KNOW” - NEW TEXT-MESSAGING CAMPAIGN FOR PHILADELPHIA TEENS PROVIDES INFORMATION AND OPTIONS FOR SEXUAL HEALTH

Philadelphia, December 17, 2012 – C.H.O.I.C.E. – Concern for Health Options: Information, Care, and Education – today announced the launch of “Need2Know,” a new public awareness campaign and text message-based hotline offering free, immediate, and confidential information and referrals regarding sexual and reproductive health.

Though available to anyone in need, the program is specifically geared toward young adults. Teenagers in Philadelphia, as in most major metropolitan areas, can and often do face obstacles to reproductive and sexual health care, leaving them at greater risk for a wide range of sexually-transmitted diseases and infections including HIV and Chlamydia. Moreover, while overall rates of teen pregnancy have dramatically decreased nationwide – a 40 percent decline from 1990 to 2008 – U.S. teen birth rates are still far higher than the majority of developed nations. In Philadelphia, approximately 3,500 teenagers give birth each year: 82 percent of these pregnancies are “unintended” or “unplanned” and nearly one-third of these teens are infected with at least one sexually transmitted infection.

Economic barriers, lack of awareness, stigma, and a host of interconnected social factors have all contributed to rising rates of STI/STD infections among the city’s young adults, as well as the persistently high rate of unintended teen pregnancy. Yet Philadelphia has a strong network of service providers and support. “By creating a text-based forum offering immediate and medically-accurate health care information regarding serious and sensitive issues in a private way, our goal is to get this information out to those who need it most, in a format they prefer and are comfortable with,” said Amy Levine, CHOICE’s recently-hired Executive Director.

“Philadelphia has a great network of resources available to teens in need, yet many teens remain reluctant to reach out to make an appointment, or don’t know what to ask or whom to call,” said Melissa Weiler Gerber, Executive Director of the Family Planning Council. “We are thrilled to be working with CHOICE and other groups that are developing innovative new strategies to ensure that teens get to the information and care they need. Together, we can begin to reverse some troubling public health trends.”

The Need2Know program will be staffed by trained professional counselors at CHOICE, and will be closely monitored by the agency to ensure that all information given is accurate and provided in a clear and unbiased manner. Texters with more difficult questions or in need of more detailed information will be encouraged to call CHOICE’s telephone hotline to speak confidentially with a live counselor. CHOICE currently operates five bilingual telephone hotlines that provide individualized support, assistance, and seamless referrals to callers regarding a range of reproductive and sexual health care topics.

Need2Know builds upon several recent initiatives that have been launched throughout the city, including Mayor Nutter’s TakeControlPhilly.org campaign to promote adolescent sexual and reproductive health, and the “I Know” campaign launched by the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) to encourage young adults to become informed, get tested, and get care for sexually transmitted infections. These programs launched both in

response to Philadelphia's disproportionately high STI/STD rates among young people and because the City has made this issue a priority public health initiative. In 2010, according to the CDC, Philadelphia's rates of infection were among the nation's highest – the city ranked sixth in reported cases of Chlamydia; fourth in reported cases of gonorrhea; and tenth in reported cases of syphilis. Females 15 to 19 experienced the highest rates of new infection, with one in eight teenage girls in that age group in Philadelphia diagnosed with either Chlamydia or gonorrhea in 2010. In 2009, youth age 13-24 accounted for 30% of new HIV infections in the city – a 90% increase from rates of new infections in the prior three years.

“We're excited to collaborate on the 'I Know' campaign with groups like CHOICE to improve teens' access to important health information and remove the barriers surrounding testing for sexually transmitted infections,” said Peter Grollman, CHOP's Vice President of Government Affairs, Community Relations & Advocacy. “Momentum is clearly building in the Philadelphia community to address this public health crisis faced by our youth. By making resources accessible via 'youth-friendly' channels such as text-messaging we can help empower teens to live healthy lifestyles in meaningful and engaging ways.”

“The City of Philadelphia is committed to improving health outcomes for young people,” said Donald Schwarz, Health Commissioner. “This program is part of a broader effort to reduce the number of new sexually transmitted infections each year, and to create an environment where awareness of health services, healthy practices, and prevention measures lead to changes in behavior.”

Founded in 1971, CHOICE-Concern for Health Options: Information, Care, and Education, works to increase access to accurate information and essential services concerning sexual, reproductive and maternal child health. CHOICE works to overcome and eliminate barriers that impede access to quality healthcare and information for all individuals--regardless of economic status, gender, age, race religion, culture, or sexual orientation. CHOICE serves more than 20,000 people each year through the operation of five bilingual (Spanish-English and other languages through a translation service) hotlines and a comprehensive program of outreach, trainings, and community education.

More information regarding CHOICE's work and the Need2Know text-messaging campaign can be found at www.choice-phila.org.

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